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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by the International Committee for Arab-Israeli Reconciliation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

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Statement

Every human being has basic needs for survival. These needs include, but are not limited to, food, shelter, clothing, a liveable environment and opportunities for advancement, and in this sense poverty may be defined as a condition in which a person or community is lacking the resources for attaining that goal. A child born in such and environment inherits poverty due to no fault of his or her own. This vicious cycle is very difficult to break for the majority of the population. Alternatively, a person can be pushed into a state of poverty by external or internal circumstances.

Poverty is a pronounced deprivation of economic well-being. It manifests itself in hunger, malnutrition, inadequate access to education, unhealthy living conditions, inadequate physical security and a lack of participation in social activities. A person who has to constantly struggle for physical survival has no additional time to achieve a higher quality of life. Poverty reflects the diminished capability of people to live the kinds of lives they envision.

Economic aspects of poverty focus on material needs that can be put into three categories: extreme, moderate and relative. Absolute poverty refers to a set standard which is consistent over time and among countries. The World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than $1.25 per day. Moderate poverty is the state in which one can survive by meeting the basic needs for a minimum standard of well-being but cannot meet the other goals of life adequately. Relative poverty is viewed in a broad social context and it is an indication of inequality rather than material deprivation or hardship.

Current situation

A search of the literature on poverty reveals the following statistics:

1. Almost half of the world's population lives on less than $2.50 a day.

2. Nearly a billion people entered the twenty-first century unable to read or write.

3. One billion children live in poverty; 640 million live without adequate shelter; 400 million have no access to safe water; and 270 million have no access to health services.

4. One child dies every four seconds.

5. Nearly 1 in 7 people live in extreme poverty and struggle daily for mere survival.

6. World hunger is a symptom of world poverty.

7. The amount of wealth spent on the military, financial bailouts and other areas benefit the wealthy and powerful.

It is often argued that the world has enough resources to lift all people out of extreme poverty. In spite of this extreme poverty persists. One oft quoted explanation is that there is no agreed upon mechanism to distribute the resources to the deserving needy. Uncontrolled population growth is diminishing these resources and making poverty the fate of many.

Poverty eradication

Luckily, the picture for the future is not that bleak. Even among the rich and powerful there is an awareness that the eradication of extreme poverty is to their own advantage. There is a multidimensional approach to poverty eradication. At the international level, the United Nations has taken a bold step by adopting, as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the goal to cut the extreme poverty in half by 2015 compared with a baseline of 1990. The international movement, "Make Poverty History", which is trying to mobilize popular support across the world, urges meaningful policy change on the part of the rich countries in three critical areas: trade, debt and aid. This will liberate millions in poor countries trapped in the prison of poverty.

Although the economic prosperity of a country is a very important component in the fight against poverty, such growth does not always translate into the eradication of poverty within a country. The poor must be empowered to be a part of the poverty eradication programme and to play an active and productive role. If the poor remain silent and wait for the rich to issue a call for justice they will have to wait and transmit their hopes to the younger generation of the poor, and the poverty cycle will continue. The time to act is right now. The poor should be guided in that direction by all social activists.

Poverty eradication programmes can only work if the poor can be motivated to answer the call to play their role in this process. If a poor person ignores the call for liberation and is determined to live inside a prison of poverty he or she will continue on the path of poverty and will hand it on to the next generation.